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## The Reform of Roman Curia:

are also the most relevant developments enshrined in the new Constitution. The Roman Curia will thus be composed of sixteen Dicasteries plus judicial bodies, financial bodies, three Offices (Prefecture of the Papal Household, Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the

### Introduction

On the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, March 19, 2022, Pope Francis unveiled the new Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia, entitled "*Praedicate Evangelium*" ("Preach the Gospel"). This text, which governs the Roman Curia, entered into force on 5 June 2022, the Solemnity of Pentecost, replacing "*Pastor Bonus*" ("Good Shepherd"), which St. Pope John Paul II promulgated on 28 June 1988. This new Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (here after referred to as *PE*) is the result of lengthy collegial work, which took its cue from the 2013 pre-conclave meetings, and involved the Council of Cardinals with meetings from October 2013 to February 2022, taking place under the guidance of Pope Francis and with various contributions from the local Churches around the world.

*PE* is described as an effort to provide a mission-oriented framework for everything about the Roman Curia in the Vatican. It returns to the initial vision Pope Francis had for a "missionary conversion" for the entire Church. Indeed, the opening citation of

*PE* is from St. John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer), namely that the "proclamation of the gospel" is the "primary service which the Church offers." But beyond the "technical" reforms, the document is a faithful response to the three points, the Pope, as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio outlined during the meetings leading up to the conclave that would elect him pope on March 13, 2013. "Spiritual worldliness" is "the worst evil of the Church," and the Church has the duty to "go out of itself" to evangelize the "peripheries, not only geographical but existential."

### "Pope Francis-Effects" as Prominent Changes

Besides the creation of a Dicastery for Evangelisation presided over directly by the Pope as the first in the list of Dicasteries, the creation of a new Dicastery for the Service of Charity, the creation of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, the creation of new disciplinary section and placing the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith

## *The Intent and Impact*

Supreme Pontiff, Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church), Legal Officers and institutions connected with the Holy See. Besides the Section for General Affairs and the Section for Relations with States and International Organisations, the Secretariat of State, now renamed "Papal Secretariat," includes a Section for the Diplomatic Staff of the Holy See. It is safe to say that the reform of the Roman Curia is potentially one of the most impactful developments of the Francis pontificate. Re-orienting the activities of the Curia around the core 1) Mission of Evangelization, 2) Role of the Laity in the Church and 3) Charity to the Poor brings it in line with Francis's much-emphasized pastoral priorities.

### 1. Mission Gains Precedence

The key shift in *PE* is to put evangelization not only at the heart of the Church's mission but also at the heart of the Vatican itself. *PE* emphasizes the Church's missionary mandate with the creation of a "super-dicastery" merging two offices dedicated to evangelization since this new

Dicastery for Evangelization is a consolidation of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which coordinates the Church's missionary activities, and the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, which aims to promote a renewal of the faith in countries where Christian vitality has been waning. The document is called *Praedicate Evangelium* ("Preach the Gospel"), based on the first words of the document (*incipit*). This is the unifying idea, taken from *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pope Francis' first Apostolic Exhortation) making the Church more relevant for the evangelization of today's world rather than for its self-preservation in a vanished Christendom. Cardinal Oswald Gracias states that the main point of the new apostolic constitution is that the Church's mission is evangelization.

When we turn to the descriptions of the new constitution about the Dicastery for Evangelization, some interesting facts are worthy of note. The new Dicastery for Evangelization is given a priority which is evident in its consideration before the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Pastor Bonus* (the previous Constitution on Roman Curia) by contrast, had placed the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith first in its ranking of Congregations. This re-prioritization is entirely consistent with the *ad extra* missionary orientation of Pope Francis' ecclesiology.

## 2. The Charity to the Poor Merits Upgrade

One of the most striking and innovative initiatives of Pope Francis has been the revitalization of the Pope's personal charity. The Office of the Apostolic Almoner (*Elemosineria Apostolica*), in which a bishop served as the

charitable arm of the Pope is now elevated into a new Dicastery for the Service of Charity of the Pope. It takes on new prominence, being listed third after the Dicasteries for Evangelization and the Doctrine of Faith on the list of dicasteries. The "papal almoner" had previously been an honorary position conferred on a long-serving but generally anonymous prelate, which was a kind of retirement gift. Pope Francis instead appointed a cardinal, increased his profile and budget and made his work a flagship initiative of the pontificate.

*PE* follows *Evangelii Gaudium* in seeing the Church's primary task as offering the *kerygma*, or the Good News of Jesus Christ's saving love. This "kerygmatic" proclamation must be supported by mercy visible in concrete action, which explains why the constitution envisages turning the office of the apostolic almoner (*Elemosineria Apostolica*), in which a bishop served as the charitable arm of the Pope, into a new Dicastery for the Service of Charity of the Pope. After evangelization must come charity. Raising the status of the Charitable Office of the Papal Almoner to a Dicastery, Pope Francis said he hoped the constitution would ensure the sharing of the Gospel and caring for the poor.

According to *PE*, the Dicastery for the Service of Charity will serve as an expression of God's mercy by offering charitable assistance to the poor, vulnerable, destitute and the excluded in the Pope's name, who arranges for the aid to be given wherever in the world there is need or on the occasion of grave calamities. The Dicastery for the Service of Charity is under the direction of the Almoner of His Holiness. It

"offers charitable assistance to the poor throughout the world" in the name of the Holy Father, who "in cases of special need or other necessity, personally sets out the aids to be given." The task of the Dicastery is also "to receive, seek and request free donations for the works of charity offered by the Roman Pontiff to those most in need."

Just as the missionary impulse is a continuation of John Paul's teaching on mission, the elevation of charity is a direct echo of Benedict XVI's teaching in his first encyclical, "Deus Caritas est" that the Church's "deepest nature" has a triplex expression: 1) the proclamation of the gospel, 2) the worship of God and 3) the service of charity. This last is now reflected suitably in the Roman Curia.

Another interesting note is that during a vacancy in the Apostolic See (by death or resignation of the Pope) all prefects in the Roman Curia lose their office. The sole exception until now was the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Cardinal in charge of the "internal forum," matters of confession since the mercy of God is never to be interrupted.

Significantly, *PE* adds the papal almoner to that since the Service of Charity is never to be interrupted. Therefore, even during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity will continue to function and this exception marks the pastoral intent of Pope Francis towards the poor and the needy. It is surprising yet inevitable!

## 3. The Laity Held High

Pope Francis opened the door for a layperson, thus including a laywoman, to head any department of the Roman Curia. The key line comes in chapter two,

section five, in which the *PE* states that “For this reason, any member of the faithful can preside over a Dicastery or Office, depending on the power of governance and the specific competence and function of the Dicastery or Office in question.” Significantly, this is the development of a desire expressed in the texts of the Vatican II regarding the role of the laity.

The Pope’s firm resolution to foster more space for lay people, including in leadership positions is commendable. To this end, Pope Francis recalls in the Preamble that “the Pope, the bishops and other ordained ministers are not the only evangelizers in the Church” and because of this, the curial reform “must provide for the involvement of lay people, even in roles of government and responsibility.”

The new constitution will abolish the traditional distinction between bodies with executive powers (Congregations) and those that are purely advisory (Pontifical Councils) so that all will be known in the future by their generic name of dicasteries.

In principle, all dicasteries could be chaired either by a layman or woman, even though Pope Francis has clarified on other occasions that clerics must continue to head dicasteries that have juridical oversight over other clerics, such as the dicasteries for clergy and bishops. If any member of the faithful can head a Dicastery, “given their particular competence, power of governance, and particular function,” it is because every institution of the Curia acts in virtue of the power entrusted to it by the Pope. This passage, which is already being acted on, traces back to the conciliar theology of the laity. The affirmation contained in the

new Apostolic Constitution makes it clear that a prefect or a secretary of a Dicastery who happens to be a bishop does not have authority as such, but only insofar as they exercise the authority conferred on them by the Bishop of Rome. And this authority, within the Roman Curia, is the same whether it is received by a bishop, a priest, a religious, a layman or a laywoman.

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The Dicastery for Communication is headed by a lay prefect Mr Paolo Ruffini since 2018. Tellingly, three women (two religious sisters and law woman) have been appointed by Pope Francis on 13 July 2022 to the Dicastery responsible for identifying future bishops globally.

## **Conclusion**

The task is accomplished. But what is the task ahead? The real test of Pope Francis’ reforms, however, will be in their implementation. The Apostolic Constitution “*Praedicate Evangelium*” represents the realization of one of the chief goals of Pope Francis’ pontificate: the reform of the Roman Curia.

Many of the reforms have already been implemented in recent years, even before the new Constitution was promulgated, although all the offices of the Roman Curia will need to assure their current statutes are fully in line with the missionary and evangelizing intent continually

echoed in the Apostolic Constitution *PE*.

The priority of evangelization, the role of the laity and the preference for the poor are the primary ideas that connect the new Apostolic Constitution governing the Roman Curia with the Second Vatican Council. The document does make some significant changes and provides the vision of a Curia that is evangelical, service-oriented, promotes synodality, is shorn of careerism and highly professional.

While we welcome the changes effected by Pope Francis, it is equally important and necessary that not only the officials but also everyone of us as missionary disciples toils to imbibe “the Pope Francis Spirit” behind all these changes to give expression to the intent of the Pope’s mind and heart in their day-to-day life and functioning of the Church. Missionary priority, option for the poor and synodal style in our ecclesial life by involving the laity are of paramount importance and it is our task ahead to be fulfilled.

The reform of structures consists in ensuring that they all become more mission-oriented. Pope Francis, in the core document of his papacy, *Evangelii Gaudium*, published in the year of his election, called all structures of the Church to be channelled towards evangelization.

As such, no reform of the curia would be possible without an “interior reform.”



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